FRIDAY
June 5, 2009

THE NEWS TODAY

STATE

Ritter vetoes firefighter bill

It would have granted collective-bargaining rights to firefighters' unions. **A3**

SCIENCE

Humans, apes share a laugh

Or its origins, anyway. People and great apes seem to have inherited laughter from a shared ancestor. **A8**

TIP JAR

Health screenings for seniors at mall

The Colorado Springs Senior Resource Council hosts the annual Senior Expo 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today at The Citadel mall. The free event provides screenings such as blood pressure checks and information on Medicare, housing

IN SPORTS >

A BIG UNIT OF MEASURE

Left-hander Randy Johnson, 45, joins an elite fraternity as he becomes the 24th pitcher in major-league history to notch 300 wins – the second-oldest to do so

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HEALTH CARE

PUSH FOR SAME-SEX BENEFITS REVIVED

'Plus-one' plan appears to have picked up council support

BY DANIEL J. CHACÓN
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A political advocacy group is reviving a controversial proposal to expand health benefits to Colorado Springs city employees, including same-sex couples.

In 2003, the City Council shot down a similar proposal to give employees "plus-one" health coverage in an upset 5-4 vote.

At the time, supporters thought former Councilwoman Margaret Radford, who was considered the swing vote, was in favor of the proposal. But she changed her mind at the last minute after intense lobbying from fundamentalist Christians.

Since then, the dynamics of the council have changed, and five of the nine members

SEE INSURANCE • PAGE 2

WILDLIFE

Milled-a-bear: Nomad

FIRE DEPARTMENT

FEMALE PIONEER

LOTTERIES

Lotto: 17, 20, 29, 36, 37, 42
Saturday's estimated jackpot: $2.4 million

Cash 5: 11, 13, 28, 29, 32
Drawings are held Monday through Saturday

Powerball: 16, 20, 22, 32, 37

Powerball: 9 - Powerplay: 2
Saturday's estimated jackpot: $25 million

The Gazette

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All Subscriptions active on Dec. 25th 2008, Jan 1st 2009, Feb 16th 2009, May 25th 2009, July 4th 2009, Sept 7th 2009, and Nov 26th 2009 will include that day's edition.

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INSURANCE: Plan's price tag debated

FROM PAGE 1

said Thursday they were warm to the latest effort.

"I think it's important for this city to demonstrate to the community that we believe that everybody is equal when it comes to benefits from the city," Councilwoman Jan Martin said after the Citizens Project announced at its annual Creating Community Breakfast that it was going to resuscitate the proposal.

Councilman Scott Hente, who also attended the breakfast, agreed, saying it sends the "right message" to businesses looking to locate in the city.

"I think this does a lot to try to attract jobs to Colorado Springs because I think it sends a message about our acceptance, and I think a lot of companies are starting to look at that sort of thing," he said. "This is not so much a social issue with me as it is a business issue."

News of the proposal comes as the city's Human Resources Department is recommending employee premium increases for the city's self-insured plan ranging from 5 percent to 25 percent for 2010 "to better match our expenses," according to a memo to the council.

Barb Van Hoy, executive director of the Citizens Project, said she's "fairly confident" the proposal would be revenue-neutral based on information gathered in the past. However, she said the data needs to be updated.

"The idea is that enough younger, more healthy people would come in to offset the older, less healthy people, so that the overall impact to the insurance pool would be negligible," she said. "It wouldn't increase premiums."

Under the proposal, which would also apply to unmarried heterosexual couples and other people, the family would pay the entire premium, she said.

The plan will "help Colorado Springs begin to catch up with the rest of the state and nation in expanding employee benefits to diverse families, including gay and lesbian families," Van Hoy told the audience of about 500 at the breakfast.

Carrie Gordon Earll, a spokeswoman for Focus on the Family, said the ministry can't react to what's being proposed until it's seen a formal proposal. But she said a benefits package for two people who are "domestically connected but cannot legally marry," such as a mother and a daughter, would not be unreasonable.

"If you base this on not who you sleep with but who you domestically live with, then you're not limiting to same-sex couples," she said. "You're making it available to other people as well."

Councilman Bernie Herpin said he would support the plan "depending on the structure." But he said he was concerned about the message it would send to laid-off city employees.

"While the proposal may have merit, I'm not sure the timing is good," he said. "But I'll reserve judgment on that until I actually see the proposal. We have not talked about any specifics at all."

Vice Mayor Larry Small, who sponsored the 2003 proposal, and Councilman Jerry Heimlicher said they could support the proposal if it didn't cost the city any money.

"If we're trying to extend health care coverage to some of our citizens and we can do it with no impact to the general fund, and we can get people off the uninsured rolls, I think everybody should be in favor of that," Small said.

Mayor Lionel Rivera, who campaigned in 2003 on a promise to get rid of same-sex health care benefits adopted in 2002, said he's not sure the city can afford the "plus-one" benefits plan.

"It was a long time since we looked at it before, and I think if we were going to consider it again, we'd have to review the past memos and have a discussion on what would be the benefits to city, to the work force and how would it enhance city services to our citizens," he said. "That has to be weighed against the costs."

Call the writer at 476-1623

CORRECTIONS

The Gazette corrects errors of fact in this space. If you find mistakes, please call 636-0266 during business hours.

A brief in Thursday's Business section on page B9 about the state Unemployment Insurance program gave a wrong number for callers with existing claims who have questions or need to resolve a problem. The correct number is 1-800-388-5515.

BACK PAGES

June 5, 1909
A smooth begging scheme was worked yesterday by two men who stood in the corridors of the post office and asked each passerby for a stamp to send a letter home. The men netted several dollars before they were ordered out by threats of arrest.

June 5, 1934
El Paso county farmer John Cooper has rigged up a contrivance which in demonstrations has proved just as effective as it is spectacular, and it fries grasshoppers to a crisp by way of rendering them hors de combat. Cooper has fixed up a bed of hog wire between iron pipes attached to cultivator wheels. He piles inflammable material on the bed, lights it, and drives over the infested area to the tune of frying grasshoppers.

June 5, 1959